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My Personal Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer

By William Stillman

There's a trail through a wooded area near my house where I like to take long walks. I try to do this twice a day, weather and schedule permitting. As I pass through this green glen, I often see deer and hawks, but I've also seen a red fox and, on a couple of occasions, up to 15 wild turkey. It's a peaceful place, one perfect for entering into a state of solitude. It is here that I recite the Lord's Prayer. However, I've recently put emphasis on not just reciting but interpreting — what is the true intention of each verse as it pertains to me. I'm aware of the traditional and historical meaning, but here is how I've chosen to interpret the prayer. I would welcome reader feedback as well as alternate interpretations. I was raised in the Episcopal Church, so here is the version to which I am accustomed:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

"Our Father" — Not mine alone but *ours*, which makes me less self-centered and more conscious of those around me. As I walk alone, I understand this to extend to everything I see, hear and feel: the birds, the trees, the stones under my feet — we are all connected to "our Father."

"Father" — A paternal authority figure: a teacher, mentor and disciplinarian.

"... who art in heaven" — We're conditioned to believe that heaven is above us, in the sky. But I think heaven, the essence of our Father, is around and within us.

"... hallowed be thy name" — Hallowed, meaning sacred. Revere and respect this powerful presence to whom this prayer is an ode of homage.

Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.



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This one had me puzzled for a while, but I finally understood the first line might suggest that “thy kingdom come” was pending. In other words, until, or in lieu of, the full realization of God’s kingdom, we must strive to emulate on earth how business is conducted in heaven. Meaning, purvey all that is right and true and good and kind.

Give us this day our daily bread,

Give us *this* day — we’re not guaranteed tomorrow. Give thanks for what we have been given in this moment. “Our daily bread” doesn’t only pertain to physical nourishment. In my interpretation, it pertains to spiritual nourishment. In other words, please grant me all that I need on this day in order to fulfill the preceding commitment about doing it like it’s done in heaven.

... and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

This is a tough one; its interpretation is as unique and individual as each individual is unique. Why? Because as human beings, we’re imperfect. Many of us would prefer not to illuminate the truth about our trespasses against others. If we did (or did so more often), we’d see clearly we need to strive harder to do it “on earth as it is in heaven.” Doing so requires that we confront the three most powerful words any of us can say about ourselves, “I was wrong.”

Forgiving those who trespass against us is another tough one. Some of us are better equipped to forgive than others dependent, perhaps, on the severity of the trespass. I was bullied as a child and adolescent. It wasn’t until I was in my 20s that I was able to put it in proper perspective and actually have empathy for the plight of my tormentors. I admire those who forgive individuals who murdered their loved ones, and find peace and comfort in doing so. In unusual but glorious circumstances, sometimes the victim and perpetrator actually bond.

... and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

In my opinion, this verse is about our individual conscience and our collective consciousness. I can sooner see our faulty egos leading us into temptation, as so frequently occurs, as opposed to God deliberately leading us astray. In order not to be led into temptation, we need to be aware of the commitment we’ve made in the prayer thus far.



Asking to be delivered from evil keeps us conscious of its pitfalls, and the duplicitous and deceptive manner in which evil attempts to seduce us.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.


Here the prayer comes full circle by closing with a reminder that all things originate in God. And it is then that I express gratitude and appreciation for the beauty of all I survey.

Funny thing is, I noticed last spring that in the area of the trail where I begin and end my prayer, everything seemed to bloom a lot faster than the surrounding area. Makes you wonder.

 **William Stillman**

Award-winning author of *Autism and the God Connection*

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